

ADRESS TO THE NEHAWU NATIONAL CONGRESS: 29
SEPTEMBER 2010.

Comrade President and National Office- bearers of NEHAWU,
The National Executive Committee,
Delegates to this National Congress,
Leadership of COSATU,
Leadership of the Party,
Invited guests,

Let me start off by apologizing for all the inconvenience caused by the late showing of the African National Congress in this august gathering. We appreciate the lost opportunity of influencing the discussions and in that way contribute in shaping the direction that NEHAWU would take moving forward. The whole confusion was, in the main, caused by the fact that the president of the ANC is in Brussels engaging with the European Union on trade and broader relations. Attempts to persuade the Deputy President to stand in for him ran into problems yesterday when we were sure that there was agreement on the arrangement. We sincerely apologise on behalf of the ANC. I must confess that we had agreed with comrade Slovo that we must get somebody else other than myself for some reasons that can only remain confidential.

Comrades you are holding your National Congress just two days after we concluded our own historic National General Council. This NGC was historic in a number of ways: -

- Commentators had predicted that it was going to be rowdy and we would all go out of it walking on the slippery blood on the floor.

- They predicted that the focus would be on the so-called succession debate, with the ANC on each other's throat with its Youth League.
- Many of them went into details about how fast in decline the ANC was.

We are now back with our submission that the ANC is in better shape than it was both during the 2005 NGC and the 2007 Polokwane National Conference having been confirmed. The small growth of about 128000 members was not a fluke. It confirmed a theory that the unions can borrow that membership is the necessary infrastructure for sustainability of the organisation and its campaigns. Our weakest point remains the Western Cape, and that is where the ANC structures are the weakest. KZN is the fastest growing province, because the volunteer corp movement is driving all the campaigns, including the recruitment campaign.

The healthy policy debates made us come out of the NGC in better shape. The much anticipated fight over the Nationalisation of the mines did not materialize despite the rowdiness in the Economic Transformation commission. The resolution that came out directs the NEC to do an in-depth study on nationalization of the mines, a task that will be fulfilled before the policy conference in 2012, recommendations of which will be referred to the national conference. What is exciting about the resolution is that it is directing the NEC to look into other sectors that need state intervention. My own passion is in giving the Posbank a proper banking licence so that the state can have a visible footprint in the financial sector. Before the 2012 elective National Conference of the ANC we must ensure that the banking licence given to the Posbank and state owned mining company must be

operational. We must also be able to submit case studies of how other major mining economies run their resource sectors.

The agreement on the implementation of the National Health Insurance must be of interest to NEHAWU in particular and the trade union movement in general. The focus should be on ensuring that our people have access to quality health care. The evaluation of the state of health services in all our provinces point to the lack of managerial capacity and widespread misplacement of skills in the sector. The directive given to all the provinces is that comrades who are misplaced must be redeployed to where their skills will be appropriate. The policy position that says that one does not need to be doctor to be the CEO of a hospital has been interpreted as meaning that you must never be a doctor to run a hospital. It is the working class that is paying dearly for this distortion. NEHAWU in particular and the trade union movement in general must cooperate with the state if we are to correct this situation. We are throwing to COSATU the challenge of defining the role of the revolutionary trade union movement in improving the quality of service rendered and received by our people. That call is not a matter of the relations with the state as an employer but a function of the revolutionary and ideological content of serving the people and conscious trade unionist being revolutionaries. It must never sit well with the activist of the movement that even a perception is created that it is better under the recycled old Nationalist Party, the DA than being in provinces governed by the ANC.

This is at the heart of the conflict during the strike which is whether the working people and the rural poor should be used as the pressure point on each other, as parties to collective bargaining. This must be engaged as a

political question than finger pointing that becomes prevalent when there are tensions. Equally important is the need to negotiate and finalise the essential services agreement. This is helpful for both the state and the unions in ensuring that our image is not dented by default because in the heat of conflict members do things that are beyond our control. It is during these difficult times that leadership is needed.

Failure to appreciate that we will always need each other can easily make us assume that the alliance is not important. This is a weakness for all the alliance partners. Even in the ANC there are times when comrades believe that they can be better on their own and the alliance partners are an irritation. This is the case with the alliance partners as well that we get tempted to believe that we can break the alliance and remain stronger. I call this the myth of false confidence. The alliance is as relevant now as ever. We must repeat this message over and over until even those who had doubts begin to appreciate the value of this revolutionary alliance. When we work together we are always better and stronger. We must also decode the description of unions as being reformist in outlook. It does not mean that they are less revolutionary than other sectors in society, but that they will always demand increases and better conditions of employment without changing the system, as the value of money is always corroded by inflation. A strike is the ultimate tool in the hands of workers when everything else fails. This makes it critical to use this tool wisely and never discredit it in action or in pronouncement, because doing so is tantamount to disarming the workers. Strike action must never be criminalized by the employer and unions must be firm against criminal activities during the strike. There will be strikes in

future, as this not the first and the last strike. Integrity among negotiators works to our advantage in future.

I gave the public sector unions an advice that worked for me when I was a trade union leader. I said there is nothing better in developing leadership than having a team that is representative in the bargaining chambers. We used to take eighty mineworkers to the chamber so that every mine had a sense of the process and not only deal with the product. With full time shop stewards it is possible to ensure that every province has a minimum number of representatives in the bargaining chamber. This makes reporting back better, more efficient and effective. Please discuss this approach and make the necessary adaptations.

We are giving you all these advices and views because we need each other, leave the emotional feelings aside. We can only successfully transform society if we work together. The ANC as the strategic centre of power and the leader of the alliance does not lead itself. It leads the alliance and society. When alliance partners are united society is more confident about the future. Together we have better capacity to mobilize society. Trade unions as schools for “communism” must continue generating leadership for various roles in society. That responsibility goes with the commitment to wage campaigns together. The ANC is busy with the Imvuselelo campaign which is in line with the commitment of COSATU to swell the ranks of the ANC. Swelling the ranks of the ANC is the only formula that will ensure that we make the necessary impact on the direction taken by the ANC. The fact that the working class is the leading motive force of the revolution will always be earned, and not a given. The working class cannot expect other

class forces to articulate their interests, they must be there themselves. The bias towards the working class is not a slogan but a product of the role the working class played in the struggle for liberation. This role is more critical during the current phase of the revolution. If we do these basic things and increase our influence on the movement, the artificial debate about who the strategic centre is will be closed. The fact that the ANC is the strategic centre of power will be beyond dispute and we will all reaffirm that the NDR is led by the ANC. The more comrades become desperate about this debate the more suspicious everybody becomes, including those who have always been sympathetic to the position taken by the alliance partners. The issue is influence and involvement in policy formulation and implementation.

Let me conclude by encouraging all of you to read the report of the NGC and continue monitoring the implementation. Continue being critical because your critical voice from the left is necessary for keeping the ANC under constant check. Other class forces have an interest in pushing it to the right. Contestation of class interests is a natural feature of a multi-class movement like ours. The inter-class character of the alliance admits to the constant contestation in the immediate and long term. When there are sharp contradictions it should not be a cause for alarm.

We wish you a successful national congress. Remember that election of leadership is a political activity. You must refuse relegating it to conspiracy and plotting. As you engage each other avoid the temptation of insulting the candidates. You will need everybody after the national congress. There should be no winners and losers. Only NEHAWU should be the winner.

Thank you.